

An Open Letter to the Arlington School Board on the 2025-2034 APS Capital Improvement Plan and Budget Issues

The goal of this communication is to encourage and directly ask APS - particularly the elected members of the School Board - to engage in more thorough and holistic planning for school sites, construction, and building maintenance via this CIP. We urge the School Board to take a broad, fiscally sound, and data-driven approach to planning; especially in your discussion, and preparation for the final adoption of the FY 2025-34 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Recommendations

1. We urge you to look at non-capital solutions to address the use of the legacy Career Center building. The relocation of programs and seat needs across the County should be addressed holistically to include a discussion of how to best use the additional seat capacity we currently have at the elementary school level, boundary changes as needed, and investments in existing buildings to extend their life and ensure safe environments for all Arlington County students.
2. Review the findings of the Facilities Condition Assessment (FCA) report, create a plan for prioritizing the required maintenance, and ensure that the proposed CIP addresses the highest or most urgent maintenance priorities. In so doing, plan to incorporate green, sustainable building practices (for example, replacing existing roofs with green or solar roofs) to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions where possible in those buildings.
3. Consider returning Arlington Community High School to the legacy career center building and explore community use and private-public partnerships to maximize use of the existing legacy building assets and resources.
4. Rebalance planning and spending between option and neighborhood schools, and view CIP decisions through a data-driven, equity lens to achieve the greatest good for the highest number of students.
5. APS must address structural budget issues* and prioritize spending, including careful consideration of CIP bond fund requests, since increased debt service is paid from operating budgets not bond funding.
6. Review the recommendations of the Community Facilities Study (2015) and take advantage of the County's planning expertise to pursue joint use opportunities to achieve highest and best use of all County and APS facilities.

*Note: Structural budget issues refers to the fact that APS begins each budget year in a deficit situation due to an imbalance between their available budget and planned expenditures. Last year, APS used one-time funding and reduced the amounts in the Minor Construction/Major Maintenance (MC/MM) to reduce the gap in the operations budget. Among other needs, maintenance of existing facilities has not been addressed because of these structural budget issues.

Further discussion of the above recommendations

1. Fully consider the operational impact on APS' continuing emphasis on creating additional seats through construction and using school bonds to fund them, especially in a year when APS

saw negative growth in students entering kindergarten for the first time in over 17 years. Simply put, we ask you to look at non-capital solutions to address relocation of programs and seat needs. In a year of tight budgets, a surplus of elementary school seats in the school system, and a year where we raised taxes to fully fund the APS budget, to focus solely on capital solutions as the School Board has done is fiscally irresponsible. We align ourselves with the [JFAC letter](#) and CIP presentation that asked APS to put non-capital solutions on the table. APS has already scheduled an elementary school boundary process to take place in 2025. A few of you have heard in meetings with parent groups - including at least one Montessori parent - that there are at least two viable solutions and that MPSA requirements could be satisfied through the boundary process. Please consider a non-capital solution for the MPSA program relocation.

2. Consider the recent findings of the [Facilities Condition Assessment \(FCA\)](#), that applied criteria to APS schools and identified several neighborhood schools, including some of our Title 1 schools, as needing major renovations or rebuilds. The proposed CIP does not fully address the priorities for or fund the recommendations made in the FCA report in this 10-year CIP. We agree with the [County Council of PTA's \(CCPTA\) CIP letter](#) which discusses how over \$300 million in needed improvements to 39 schools - identified by consultants APS paid to prepare that assessment - are not projected to be addressed in this proposed 10-year CIP. Take this opportunity to prioritize the maintenance outlined in the FCA report, determine which facilities should be prioritized, incorporate the latest in green building and sustainability practices to reduce carbon emissions, and ensure that this CIP reflects those priorities.

3. In the [Career Center Working Group's Final Report](#) (2018), we wrote: "Cooperative, coordinated, long-range planning processes are Arlington's best opportunity to continue delivering the excellent education provided by APS while finding comprehensive solutions that make efficient use of our limited land and dollars." We urge you to review the 2018 Career Center Working Group Report principles that included a broad-based community recommendation to have the Career Center site serve high school students over the long term. The CCWG included County Board and School Board appointees. Considering that demographic projections now show that more elementary school seats are not needed over the next 5-10 years due to decreases in student population, we need to consider other, non-capital options for relocation of the Montessori (MPSA) program or renovation and upgrades to the existing building. Given the projection of almost 1300 surplus elementary school seats over the next few years, the \$45+ million renovation cost to refit the legacy Career Center building to younger students, and the delay in doing so (estimates are for completion in 2029 or 2030), the MPSA program should find a new space as a result of the already planned ES boundary process in 2025 or invest in extending the life of the MPSA building. Either way, this would have the additional bonus of allowing the Career Center site to be completed at least two years earlier than projected, and if relocated to another building through the boundary process, the Montessori program could relocate two years ahead of the schedule outlined in the CIP..

In moving the Arlington Community High School back to the Career Center site and making it a high school campus, APS could include further onsite uses that benefit the ACHS students, the neighborhood, and the community, making the legacy Career Center building a truly joint use space. Ideas include:

- Relocation of APS transportation staff at the Trades Center to the legacy Career Center building, since there may not be space for them at the Trades Center during and after construction;
- Introduce a CDL certification program for bus drivers at the Career Center to correspond with their moved offices and create a pipeline of potential bus drivers (we have a consistent shortage and most of our drivers don't live in Arlington);
- Create community meeting space on the second floor of the Columbia Pike Library;
- Create public-private partnership or rent out excess space in the legacy Career Center building to Northern Virginia Community College, which routinely looks for space to provide college classes in Arlington - and what better place than the Career Center campus;
- Rent the existing day-care center space (since another will be created in the new Career Center building for the early childhood education program and the space already exists in the legacy building for preschool classes) to provide subsidized day care at this Columbia Pike location since we are in need of quality daycare across Arlington.

4. In recent years, APS - and the School Board in particular - have focused on supporting specific option programs over neighborhood schools in the CIP - neighborhood schools that serve a large number of students of color and those on free and reduced meal programs. We understand that for over a decade APS was focused on construction to provide seats for students, and that was an urgent priority. Demographic projections now show a surplus of seats, and we urge the school board to focus the CIP expenditures over the next 10 years to address existing school buildings that require maintenance. We ask APS to view these decisions through an equity lens.

- Much has been made in past testimony to the School Board about who the MPSA program is serving, and some assertions need to be corrected. Based on APS data, the fact is that of the APS elementary school *option programs*, the MPSA serves the lowest number of non-white students and the least number of students on the free and reduced meals program. When compared to who is served in our neighborhood schools (Barcroft, Barrett, Carlin Springs, Drew), the differences are more pronounced. We are not arguing that MPSA should not have its own school, but rather asking APS to consider equity as an important criterion when making decisions about CIP expenditures, and to prioritize funding necessary maintenance projects in the schools identified in the FCA report, many of which serve a higher majority of minority students and those served by the FARM program.

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APS Civil Rights Statistics (source: [Civil-Rights-Table-1-2022-web.pdf \(apsva.us\)](#))

School Name	American Indian/Alaskan Native		Asian		Black/African American		Hispanic		Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander		White		Multiple		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Abingdon Elementary School	4	0.6%	69	9.9%	102	14.7%	226	32.6%	0	0.0%	245	35.3%	48	6.9%	694
Alice West Fleet Elementary School	0	0.0%	49	9.1%	96	17.8%	163	30.2%	1	0.2%	200	37.1%	30	5.6%	539
Arlington Science Focus Elementary	2	0.4%	88	16.1%	43	7.8%	44	8.0%	0	0.0%	302	55.1%	69	12.6%	548
Arlington Traditional Elementary	0	0.0%	148	23.8%	124	19.9%	67	10.8%	0	0.0%	220	35.3%	64	10.3%	623
Ashlawn Elementary School	0	0.0%	41	7.7%	25	4.7%	101	19.0%	0	0.0%	308	57.9%	57	10.7%	532
Barcroft Elementary School	0	0.0%	22	5.2%	41	9.6%	227	53.3%	0	0.0%	112	26.3%	24	5.6%	426
Barrett Elementary School	1	0.2%	25	5.1%	45	9.1%	263	53.3%	0	0.0%	130	26.4%	29	5.9%	493
Campbell Elementary School	0	0.0%	29	7.6%	62	16.2%	115	30.1%	0	0.0%	145	38.0%	31	8.1%	382
Cardinal Elementary School	0	0.0%	25	3.6%	28	4.0%	46	6.5%	0	0.0%	537	76.3%	68	9.7%	704
Carlin Springs Elementary School	0	0.0%	58	12.3%	40	8.5%	339	71.7%	0	0.0%	23	4.9%	13	2.7%	473
Claremont Elementary School	2	0.4%	17	3.0%	19	3.3%	327	57.3%	0	0.0%	164	28.7%	42	7.4%	571
Discovery Elementary School	2	0.4%	23	4.7%	3	0.6%	41	8.4%	0	0.0%	355	73.0%	62	12.8%	486
Dr. Charles R. Drew Elementary School	1	0.2%	24	5.9%	128	31.4%	162	39.7%	0	0.0%	76	18.6%	17	4.2%	408
Escuela Key Elementary School	1	0.2%	22	3.7%	12	2.0%	321	54.6%	0	0.0%	184	31.3%	48	8.2%	588
Glebe Elementary School	0	0.0%	52	10.0%	28	5.4%	87	16.7%	0	0.0%	301	57.8%	53	10.2%	521
Hoffman-Boston Elementary School	2	0.4%	112	22.8%	94	19.1%	126	25.6%	0	0.0%	122	24.8%	36	7.3%	492
Innovation Elementary School	1	0.2%	94	21.6%	71	16.3%	69	15.9%	1	0.2%	150	34.5%	49	11.3%	435
Jamestown Elementary School	0	0.0%	14	3.2%	6	1.4%	34	7.7%	0	0.0%	339	77.0%	47	10.7%	440
Long Branch Elementary School	0	0.0%	45	11.8%	37	9.7%	86	22.6%	0	0.0%	181	47.5%	32	8.4%	381
Montessori Public School of Arlington	0	0.0%	47	12.0%	58	14.8%	77	19.6%	0	0.0%	159	40.5%	52	13.2%	393
Nottingham Elementary School	0	0.0%	17	4.3%	4	1.0%	30	7.7%	0	0.0%	292	74.7%	48	12.3%	391
Oakridge Elementary School	0	0.0%	57	8.9%	129	20.2%	142	22.3%	2	0.3%	261	40.9%	47	7.4%	638
Randolph Elementary School	2	0.5%	24	6.4%	57	15.2%	227	60.4%	0	0.0%	51	13.6%	15	4.0%	376
Taylor Elementary School	1	0.2%	40	7.6%	22	4.2%	58	11.0%	0	0.0%	340	64.6%	65	12.4%	526
Tuckahoe Elementary School	1	0.2%	23	5.5%	6	1.4%	37	8.8%	0	0.0%	309	73.4%	45	10.7%	421
Total Elementary	20	0.2%	1165	9.3%	1280	10.3%	3415	27.8%	4	0.0%	5506	43.7%	1091	8.7%	12481

Free and Reduced Meal Statistics (source: [FREE-REDUCED-DECEMBER-2023.pdf \(apsva.us\)](#))

SCHOOL	TOTAL STUDENTS	MEAL BENEFITS	MEAL BENEFITS
ABINGDON	CEP	CEP	CEP
ALICE WEST FLEET	594	240	40.40%
ARL. TRADITIONAL	662	246	37.16%
ARL. COMM. H.S. (ARL.CAREER CENTER)***	850	279	32.82%
ASHLAWN	535	97	18.13%
BARCROFT	CEP	CEP	CEP
BARRETT	CEP	CEP	CEP
CAMPBELL	412	166	40.29%
CARDINAL	716	42	5.87%
CARLIN SPRINGS	CEP	CEP	CEP
CLAREMONT	623	220	35.31%
DISCOVERY	522	22	4.21%
DOROTHY HAMM	898	159	17.71%
DREW	CEP	CEP	CEP
ESCUELA KEY	581	199	34.25%
GLEBE	542	73	13.47%
GUNSTON	993	359	36.15%
HB WOODLAWN** (SHRIVER)	748	93	12.43%
HOFFMAN BOSTON	607	280	46.13%
INNOVATION	498	189	37.95%
JAMESTOWN	466	16	3.43%
JEFFERSON *(LANGSTON)	1042	405	38.87%
KENMORE	CEP	CEP	CEP
LONG BRANCH	430	130	30.23%
MONTESSORI	524	145	27.67%
NOTTINGHAM	375	10	2.67%
OAKRIDGE	641	193	30.11%
RANDOLPH	CEP	CEP	CEP
SCIENCE FOCUS	592	82	13.85%
SWANSON	934	192	20.56%
TAYLOR	532	44	8.27%
TUCKAHOE	452	15	3.32%
WAKEFIELD	2312	898	38.84%
WASHINGTON LIBERTY	2534	752	29.68%
WILLIAMSBURG	811	23	2.84%

- Since it seems apparent the school building promised by Amazon on the campus of their main headquarters will not be built anytime soon, the Arlington Community High School (ACHS) program should be returned to the Career Center site and occupy the legacy Career Center building. These students don't have a vocal constituency advocating before the School Board. The evidence is that this program has been moved around several times and thought it had finally found a home in the Fenwick Building a few years ago (and the Career Center Working Group charge and consensus recommendations indicated that the ACHS should stay on the Career Center site), but the building was knocked down to make room for the new Arlington Tech and Career Center building. Each time they have moved locations, the program has lost students - especially those over 18 years of age - who were not absorbed back into their designated high schools and likely did not complete their education.

APS Civil Rights Statistics (source: [Civil-Rights-Table-1-2022-web.pdf \(apsva.us\)](https://www.apsva.us/civil-rights-table-1-2022-web.pdf))

School Name	American Indian/Alaskan Native		Asian		Black/African American		Hispanic		Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander		White		Multiple		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Arlington Career Center	0	0.0%	29	5.3%	57	10.4%	200	36.4%	0	0.0%	221	40.3%	42	7.7%	549
Arlington Community High School	0	0.0%	6	5.7%	10	9.5%	80	76.2%	0	0.0%	9	8.6%	0	0.0%	105
Langston High School Continuation	1	1.8%	1	1.8%	9	16.1%	31	55.4%	0	0.0%	10	17.9%	4	7.1%	56
Wakefield High School	5	0.2%	154	6.5%	442	18.7%	1066	45.2%	2	0.1%	578	24.5%	113	4.8%	2360
Washington-Liberty High School	3	0.1%	227	9.6%	193	8.2%	771	32.6%	1	0.0%	1001	42.3%	172	7.3%	2368
Yorktown High School	4	0.2%	165	7.5%	123	5.6%	358	16.3%	0	0.0%	1342	61.2%	200	9.1%	2192
Total High	13	0.4%	582	6.1%	834	11.4%	2506	43.7%	3	0.0%	3161	32.5%	531	6.0%	7630

Montessori Public School of Arlington	0	0.0%	47	12.0%	58	14.8%	77	19.6%	0	0.0%	159	40.5%	52	13.2%	393
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FREE AND REDUCED ELIGIBILITY AND CLAIMING STATS

SCHOOL	TOTAL STUDENTS	TOTAL W/ MEAL BENEFITS	PERCENT W/ MEAL BENEFITS
ABINGDON	CEP	CEP	CEP
ALICE WEST FLEET	594	240	40.40%
ARL. TRADITIONAL	662	246	37.16%
ARL. COMM. H.S. (ARL.CAREER CENTER)***	850	279	32.82%

Note: The number includes the Arlington Career Center and Arlington Tech FARM statistics. Given the student demographics of the ACHS program, it is likely that the number of ACHS students on Free and Reduced Meals alone is higher than the consolidated number being reported for all three programs. At any rate, it is higher than the 27.67% MPSA students on Free and Reduced Meals.

ACHS loses population every time it moves.

2023 numbers: 85 (9-12) and 66 over 18, for a total of 151 students.

2022 numbers: 108 (9-12) and 101 over 18, for a total of 209 students.

Note: We are also seeing significant increases in the drop-out rate for students of color and English language learners in the ACHS (and Langston programs).

ACHS Drop-Out Rates (source: analytics.apsva.us/public/equity/aps_graduation.html)

Percent High School Dropouts			
School Year	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
% Total Dropouts	0.00	0.00	6.71
% Asian	0.00	0.00	11.11
% Black	0.00	0.00	7.69
% Hispanic	0.00	0.00	7.09
% Other	0.00	0.00	0.00
% White	0.00	0.00	0.00
% English Learners (1-6)	0.00	0.00	6.73
% Students With Disabilities	0.00	0.00	0.00
% Female	0.00	0.00	5.48
% Male	0.00	0.00	7.78
% Non Binary	*	*	*

Langston Drop-Out Rates (source: analytics.apsva.us/public/equity/aps_graduation.html)

Percent High School Dropouts			
School Year	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
% Total Dropouts	5.79	15.04	10.43
% Asian	0.00	16.67	25.00
% Black	0.00	4.76	4.55
% Hispanic	9.21	15.71	11.94
% Other	0.00	0.00	25.00
% White	0.00	30.77	0.00
% English Learners (1-6)	9.52	14.81	21.88
% Students With Disabilities	4.00	15.63	10.26
% Female	2.04	9.76	7.84
% Male	8.45	18.31	13.33
% Non Binary	*	*	*

5. APS must address escalating budget issues and spending to fix structural issues, including careful consideration of CIP spending since increased debt service is paid from operating expenses. But APS cannot do this alone. We recommend that APS work with the County and take steps to fix the structural budget issues, since Arlington taxpayers cannot absorb annual budget increases to APS indefinitely. Our representatives in Richmond must also be enlisted to assist in closing the gap, since the [General Assembly's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission \(JLARC\) study](#) identifies several issues with educational funding, and makes the case for changes to the funding to schools across the Commonwealth. We must encourage our delegates to the General Assembly to act on the legislative actions recommended to fix the issues with Virginia's school funding formula and its teacher pipeline. We must take a hard look at who we are serving, and where our educational gaps exist. We must take measures to attract, retain,

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and adequately pay teachers and staff. We must make sure our buildings are well-maintained to serve the education of our students. We agree with the Budget Advisory Council (BAC) letter, especially in terms of enrollment, planning factors, and the reduction of the Minor Construction and Major Maintenance budget (MC/MM) funds used to balance this year's budget. [BAC Response to the FY25 Proposed Budget - Interim v1 amended.pdf \(boarddocs.com\)](#).

6. Review and realign your decisions in accordance with the recommendations in the [Community Facilities Study](#) (2015) which outlined the challenges facing Arlington and made recommendations for improved collaboration between APS and the County, especially in terms of planning and pursuing joint uses to achieve highest and best use of all County and APS facilities. A few related examples are discussed in the reuse ideas for the legacy Career Center building outlined in recommendation #4 above. APS has recently disbanded or relocated the staff of its Planning Division, and we strongly urge APS and the County to closely collaborate and utilize the expertise of County planning staff in making long-term construction and land use decisions.

Conclusion:

It is the duty of our elected school board to ensure each student an excellent education that meets them where they are, provides opportunities and programs that allow each student to reach their full potential, and to be good stewards of the public funds through decision-making that considers educational needs, equity in education, building capacities and conditions, and demographic trends in planning for the 10-year CIP.

We ask you to reconsider how you invest tax dollars in the school system's infrastructure and ensure that any debt we take on is truly needed, is the best use of public funds, and supports the entire school community. We urge you to reassess your current plans for this CIP, put non-capital solutions on the table for the relocation of the Montessori (MPSA) program, return the Arlington Community High School (ACHS) to the Career Center site in the legacy Career Center building, plan for, prioritize and invest in the needed maintenance to existing facilities with an eye toward environmental sustainability, and encourage you to view all your decisions through an equity lens.

We appreciate your service and your stewardship of our school system.

Respectfully,

Ginger Brown
John Giambalvo
Greg Greeley
Kelly King
Kathleen McSweeney
John Milliken
Jason Rylander
Stacy Snyder
Tannia Talento

June 14, 2024

***Note:** We are sending this letter on behalf of ourselves, not on behalf of any committees, groups, or organizations to which we may belong.*

It is worth noting that among all of us, we have served many hours over many years on APS and County efforts. We have been former PTA Presidents, Commission and Working Group Appointees (including the Superintendent's Master Planning Committee, the Community Facility Study, the Career Center Working Group and BLPC/PFRC process, former JFAC, FAC, BAC, and ACTL members and chairs, as well as Housing, and Planning Commissioners among other roles), and two have served as elected officials - a former School Board and County Board member.

cc: Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Dr. Francisco Durán, Superintendent, APS